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FM AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5573
INFO RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION 7240
RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 4615
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 8517
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 5741
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 2967
RUEHGE/AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN 0429
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 3164
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 3650
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 4963
RUEHPO/AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO 0127
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 5602
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 0206
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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 002963

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SUBJECT: BOLIVIA: AMBASSADOR CALLS FM ABOUT PHOTO ACCUSATION

REF: LA PAZ 2949

Classified By: Amb. Philip S. Goldberg for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) The Ambassador phoned Foreign Minister David Choquehuanca on November 7 to discuss recent public accusations that the Embassy was conspiring with Bolivian oligarchs and Colombian paramilitary against Evo Morales based on a photograph released on November 5. Although FM Choquehuanca publicly stated on November 6 that he would call in the Ambassador, the Embassy had not been contacted by the Foreign Ministry at any point since Evo accused the Ambassador on October 31 of meeting with a Colombian paramilitary to overthrow his government (reftel). (Note: Press reports now refer to the individual as a Colombian "mugger." End Note.)

¶2. (C) The Ambassador told Choquehuanca that he was calling him to talk before the Foreign Minister traveled again. Ambassador Goldberg said that Government Minister Alredo Rada's public attacks using a snapshot photo of the Ambassador were "inappropriate and out of context." The Ambassador informed the Foreign Minister that the Department is preparing to call in Ambassador Guzman to ask him to explain the situation. He said that President Morales' remarks are an "insult to the United States as our country has put Colombia's paramilitary groups on the terrorism list." The Ambassador told the Foreign Minister that he wanted to register his "deep disappointment" that an incident like this could occur a week after the Foreign Minister and he had agreed to try to work better together and keep issues out of the press.

¶3. (C) The Ambassador went on to explain that the photograph was taken at ExpoCruz, Bolivia's largest trade fair, where he was promoting commercial relations and friendship between Bolivia and the United States. The Ambassador himself had invited Vice President Garcia Linera and other senior Bolivian officials to that event, none of whom came. The snapshot in question is a public photo taken at a public event. The Ambassador said that he often agrees to have his picture taken with unknown people at public

events.

¶4. (C) The Foreign Minister responded that he "understood" and that he "understands our concerns." He told the Ambassador that he himself often thinks about who he might be taking pictures with when he is approached by the public. Choquehuanca added that he was still trying to improve ties with the United States and was trying schedule a lunch or dinner for the Ambassador with President Morales.

COMMENT

¶5. (C) Choquehuanca is competing with Presidential Palace insiders for influence and in this incident clearly lost control of the situation. Evo's outrageous charges and Government Minister Rada's public press spectacle have left Choquehuanca scrambling to try to repair the situation. We will see if Choquehuanca, who has Evo's ear on many issues, will prevail in these efforts. End Comment.
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